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ABSTRACT

This report describes a 2-week course in early childhood education designed for resident college students in Malawi. Section 1 discusses participation by an experimental combination of trained and untrained personnel: 6 social work supervisors, 2 paraprofessional playgroup organizers, and 13 paraprofessional playgroup leaders. Staff and objectives are described in section 2, while section 3 outlines the program of studies and daily schedule of events. An evaluation of the program is presented in Section 4, and site visits and meetings are discussed in Section 5. Section 6 concludes by presenting impressions about and recommendations for the course. A list of participants is also provided. (BJD)

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R E P O R T

ON-THE-SPOT COURSE

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

August, 1982

Blantyre, Malawi

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INTRODUCTION

The Mount Carmel International Training Centre for Community Development (MCTC) has for the past two decades been concerned with the training of personnel from developing countries. It has regularly conducted seminars, courses and study programmes at the Mount Carmel Centre, and in recent years has responded to requests by local authorities and institutions for on-the-spot courses in Early Childhood Education.

The government of Malawi, along with the Association of Preschool Playgroups in Malawi (APSPM), expressed an interest in having Israeli educators conduct an on-the-spot course in 1982. This was part of a three-year plan for personnel training that had been approved and funded by UNICEF. The experts from Israel were invited to launch the first of a series of six-week training courses. It was hoped that they would be able to direct the full six-week course, but since this was not possible, the course was divided into two periods. In the first two weeks, the Israeli teachers conducted all the sessions. They then provided guidelines for the conduct of the final four weeks in which Malawi experts would be teaching.

The course was organized by the Department of Community Services and the Association of Preschool Playgroups in Malawi, with the approval of the Secretary for Personnel Management and Training of the Office of the President and the Cabinet. It was conducted at Mpemba Staff Training College near the city of Blantyre. The students lived at the College while the staff commuted from Blantyre. Transportation, secretarial services, and administrative assistance were provided by the staff of the APSPM.

The Participants

There were 21 officially registered participants resident at Mpemba Staff Training College. This group consisted of six district social work supervisors, two para-professional district playgroup organizers, and thirteen paraprofessional playgroup leaders. The supervisors were all high school graduates, with additional social work training. The educational level of the paraprofessionals was from 8 to 10 years of schooling. All the participants understood English although some had difficulty expressing themselves in English. While the social workers generally had had no previous experience with young children, the paraprofessionals had been involved with playgroups for up to nine years.

The combination of trained and untrained personnel, with varying educational and professional backgrounds, was something of an experiment. Assessment of the success of this encounter would determine the selection of participants for future courses.

In addition to the registered participants, the planners arranged to have all the Malawi lecturers attend as many sessions as possible during the on-the-spot course. This enabled them to become familiar with the basic issues in the education of young children as presented by the Israeli team, so as to ensure continuity throughout the course. There were 4-6 such additional participants daily. Of the total number, four participants were graduates of MCTC courses.

Dr. Inonge Mbikusita-Lewanika, Regional UNICEF Advisor for Family Welfare and the Young Child, took an active part as an observer throughout the two-week period, and lectured on the role of UNICEF in the development of preschool programmes in the central and eastern regions of Africa.

The official representative of the organizing bodies, Mrs. Esnath Kalyati, Department of Community Services, Miss Mary Padambo and Mr. R.J. Mbkeani, both of the Association of Preschools in Malawi, monitored the progress of the course.

Staff

Dr. Lynne Jasik and Dr. Avima Lombard, Early Childhood Education, of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, co-ordinated and taught the course, except for introductory lectures on education and playgroups in Malawi, which were given by Mr. Chirwa of the Ministry of Education and Culture and Mr. R.J. Mbkeani of the APSPM. Local lecturers did not teach during the two-week on-the-spot programme but were scheduled to do so in the subsequent four weeks. However, the following representatives of the Department of Community Services and the Association of Preschools in Malawi, Mary C. Padambo, Emily Tembo, Fanny Thindwa, assisted in many ways and contributed to the effectiveness of the course.

Objectives

The Israeli educators were invited to conduct the training course without there having been clearly stated objectives for the course content. During the five days preceding the opening of the study, the organizers enabled the Israeli team to visit a variety of preschool playgroups and to talk with key personnel in preschool education. This was done at the request of the Israelis and resulted in the formulation of a programme which focussed on seven main points:

1. Observing children and analyzing their behaviour.
2. Children's growth and development.
3. Areas of the curriculum in the preschool.
4. Creating learning environments.
5. Planning learning activities.
6. Integrating curriculum areas around a central theme.
7. Organizing and sheduling to maximize learning.

In addition, the programme was designed to: 1) provide as many opportunities as possible for the participants to to plan, teach and evaluate learning activities of different kinds; 2) provide participants with a variety of examples of low-cost teacher-made teaching aids to take with them to their playgroups, and 3) become acquainted with a variety of playgroup settings.

This plan was accepted by the organizers and the Malawi lecturers, who agreed to visit while the course was in progress so as to observe the techniques being used and to become more familiar with the course content.

PROGRAMME OF STUDIES

The programme was organized to include the following daily activities:

1) Lectures
2) Group discussions and exercises
3) Workshops: developing curriculum materials
4) Student presentations: practice teaching in class and during site visits

In addition, there was a weekly visit to playgroups.

Schedule:

Tuesday, 3.8.82

9:00	Opening ceremonies
10:30	Mr. Chirwa: Systems of Education in Malawi
11:30	Mr. R.J. Mbkeani, Chmn. Association of Preschools in Malawi: Historical Background of Preschool Education in Malawi
12:30	Lunch
14:00	Introduction to the course: A. Lombard and L. Jasik General description of first two weeks General description of last four weeks Introductory activities Setting up the preschool classroom-workshop

Wednesday 4.8.82

8:15	Discussion on workshop project
9:00	Lecture: Observing Children
10:30	Observation exercises: in class with children
14:00	Teaching children to observe: workshop
	Observation trips to collect stones, leaves, flowers, sounds, animals and to describe "the building in which we are studying"

Thursday 5.8.82

8:15	Update charts: workshop to duplicate charts for home use
9:00	Lecture: Growth and Development
10:30	Exercises focussing on Growth and Development
	Discussions in groups
	Summary discussion on "Grouping by Age"
14:00	Planning learning games for development: workshop
	Preparing games, books and tasks for children at different developmental stages
15:30	Preparing for observation during site visit next day

Friday 6.8.82

8:30	Site visit: Observation at Kwelani Nursery School
10:30	Return to Staff Training College (Mpemba)
11:00	Discussion of observations
	Assignment of weekend group interpretation exercises
14:00	Slides on preschools in Israel
	Sharing of songs - Israeli and Malawi
15:30	Workshop activity to make individual samples of charts and games

Monday 9.8.82

8:15	Discussion of weekend assignments
9:00	Lecture: Curriculum in the Preschool
10:30	Discussion groups:"Curricular activities in today's preschools"
11:30	Planning learning-experiences
14:00	Workshop: Curricular activities in science, art, math, language
	Group discussions at each learning center - rotating every 20 minutes

Tuesday 10.8.82

8:15	Teaching small groups of children, topics of individual learning-experiences to be taught; modelling teaching with one child
9:00	Teaching each topic in small groups
10:30	Using themes as subject matter for background against which to teach skills. Example: My body
11:15	Group discussions: Planning learning-experiences around a theme: a holiday; 24 hours; homes; chickens
14:00	Preparing materials to teach the theme activities

Wednesday 11.8.82

8:15	Group practice and review of teaching activities
9:00	Groups 1 and 2 teach the class,
10:30	Groups 3 and 4 teach the class,
14:00	Official Reception, Blantyre Town Hall, in honour of the Israeli educators and the UNICEF Representative

Thursday 12.8.82

8:15	Workshop activity - completion of teaching projects
9:00	Lecture: Learning and Evaluation - organizing to make it possible
10:30	Group discussion: Suggest 5 areas for changes in the behaviour of 3 and 4 year old children in playgroups. What would you do? When would you stop?
14:00	Continuation of morning discussion - group reports
15:30	Prepare for site visit

Friday 13.8.82

8:30	Site visit - Catholic Institute Playgroup
	Individual teaching assignments
	Observation of preschool
10:30	Discuss visit - the site teaching situations
14:00	Filmstrips on curriculum areas in U.S. preschools

EVALUATION

Mpembo Staff Training College offered a fine setting for the course. Located in a rural area, not too far from the city, it provided sleeping quarters for students and meals for students and staff. There was a large, well lit, airy, classroom and a storage area for the exclusive use of the course.

The experimental combining of two groups of students with different backgrounds proved more successful than expected. The social workers, who were the only men in the group, showed increasing enthusiasm for early childhood education and participated actively in every aspect of the course. The paraprofessionals, whose experience with children was

greater, approached the course with an eagerness and a determination to get the most out of this opportunity. The diversity provided a unique 'mix' which seemed to facilitate learning in both groups.

During the course dicussion and workshop periods, the class was divided into working groups by their regions. In this way playleaders and supervisors who would, in the future, be working together, had an opportunity to learn and practice team-planning. This has implications for future regional and district in-service training.

In the organization and conduct of the course an attempt was made to simulate an environment for good learning for young children. The furniture was re-arranged, a system of routines was established, and appropriate charts were hung to be referred to by the students daily. Students were actively involved in the routines of the day and care of supplies. All these were expected to provide a good learning-setting for this course and serve as a model for future courses. More important, this way of working enabled the students to become familiar and comfortable with a system which the lecturers suggested to be highly suited to the playgroup setting.

During the two weeks of the course, it was possible to cover the basic subject areas as planned. However, because the time was limited and lectures and class discussions were conducted in English (a second language for all), each subject was presented as concisely as possible. In the discussions, workshops, and presentations which followed the introduction of each subject area, the students had at least one opportunity to analyze and apply the new learning. It was expected that in the last four weeks of the course, there would be opportunities for further exploration and application of these subject areas. As all this would be conducted in Chichewa, the local language, it would be easier for the students.

At the conclusion of the on-the-spot course, the Israeli lecturers met with the planners and the Malawi teaching staff to review what had been taught, and to go over the plan for the remainder of the six-week course. It was agreed that the basic format and approach were appropriate and would be followed. The lecturers present suggested that they would alter their usual presentation style to include active participation of the students. Site visits at playgroup centers in the areas would be continued, using the observation and experimental teaching formats introduced in the on-the-spot course.

Impressions and Recommendations

The Malawi course organizers arranged for the Israeli lecturers to visit several playgroup settings and to meet with representatives of government and non-governmental agencies.

Site visits: Kwelani Nursery School, Blantyre
Catholic Institute Playgroup, Blantyre
Area 18 Playgroup, Lilongwe
Lilongwe Community Center Playgroup, Lilongwe
Chilinde Church Community Center, Lilongwe

Meetings: Department of Community Services:

Mrs. Esnath Kalyati
Mr. Preston Nailuwa
Mr. George Mchiela
Mr. L.B. Kaiya
Mrs. Emiliana Tembo
Miss Chrissie Nzumwa

Ministry of Education:

Mr. E. Nsanja
Mr. George Padambo

Chancellor College:

Mr. Kazamira
Mr. J. Kuthemba Mwale
Miss A. Kamwendo
Mr. Steve Buggie
Mr. Peter Lino

Association of Preschool Playgroups in Malawi:

Mr. R.J. Mbkeani
Miss Mary C. Padambo

Playgroup Parents Committees:

Mr. Thupsya
Mr. Alunde

Stella Maris Convent:

Sr. Francesca Hol

UNICEF:

Dr. Inonge Mbikusita-Lewanika

From these visits and contact, the Israeli educators were able to learn about the current status of preschool education in Malawi and to become acquainted with the central problems.

REVIEW AND CONCLUSIONS

In her 1980 report on Malawi playgroups, Mrs. Rivka Horowitz of the Mount Carmel International Training Centre, wrote of the development of the playgroup movement and suggested government involvement. In the subsequent two years there had been rapid growth in the number of playgroups, especially in the central and northern regions. There is increasing demand for these playgroups and the Department of Community Services has become directly involved through financial assistance and supervision. District Social Welfare Officers in all three regions of the country have been assigned the job of monitoring and assisting the growth and development of local playgroups. In addition, the APSPM has appointed two district organizers to provide assistance to playgroup leaders.

The growth in numbers of playgroups has resulted in increasing demands on the APSPM for training of leaders. Since 1980 eleven Malawi women and men attended training courses at

the Mount Carmel Training Centre and locally, three-week courses for new play leaders were conducted. It was soon clear however that there was need for long-term planning for in-service training. To this end, funds were raised to build a permanent training centre in Blantyre and the help of UNICEF was enlisted to conduct a series of six-week courses. The Social Welfare Section of the Department of Community Services negotiated with Mount Carmel Training Centre to provide expertise for these studies, resulting in the on-the-spot course reported here.

The Ministry of Education views early childhood education as important, but has not yet included the subject in any aspect of its training programme. It is limited in funds, and while there is no immediate prospects for becoming actively involved, there have been initial exchanges regarding the curriculum in the playgroups. It appears that there is a framework for interministerial cooperation. This may make it possible for the Ministry of Education to become involved in the long-range planning with the Department of Community Services. Other ministries have not as yet concerned themselves with the subject.

In many countries universities and colleges include early childhood in their psychology and education programmes thereby creating a professional corps concerned with young children. At Chancellor College this is not yet possible, but members of the staff are prepared to lend their services to field training programmes.

One of the central problems confronting those involved with the growth of the playgroup movement is the lack of funds for personnel. Throughout the organization it is volunteers who conduct the playgroups and parents committees that provide and maintain the physical settings. This is a very limiting

factor and becomes acute at the supervisory and training level. Once trained and qualified for these roles, the leaders are often drawn into jobs which offer salary and security, leaving the playgroups in need. It is obviously difficult to attract qualified personnel under these conditions.

The playgroups are generally conducted in buildings which serve many purposes, which means that the room in which the playgroup is located must be cleared daily to allow for use by others. This puts an undue burden on the leaders and makes it more difficult to create an appropriate environment for the education of young children.

The Executive Committee of the Association of Preschool Playgroups in Malawi invited the Israeli educators to share their impressions of the playgroups and to make recommendations for the future. Seventeen days in a country is enough to become acquainted with an existing framework and to identify obvious issues. It is certainly not long enough to arrive at a deeper understanding of the problems of implementation. This was made clear to the executive committee before the Israelis presented the following recommendations:

1. Personnel: The current three-year plan for training field personnel will increase the level of skills of a percentage of the playgroup leaders. However, there is need for long-range planning to develop leadership within the framework. This entails providing opportunities for potential leaders to acquire expertise and to be advanced. A variety of regional in-service courses, seminars and workshops would be appropriate. These could even be one-day meetings devoted to a single topic.

   The training centre can serve as a resource centre in which curriculum materials and ideas, books and audio-visual materials relating to young children could be available.

In addition, it is recommended that a system of communicating new ideas and suggestions be evolved, so as to provide field personnel with fresh impetus for their daily work.

There is pressing need to expand the staff of senior personnel. The executive secretary cannot be expected to cope alone with the expanding programme. Additionally, she is slated for important advanced training abroad and unless there is appropriately trained senior staff available to carry on in her absence, the preschool playgroups movement will suffer a setback.

It is imperative that means be found to provide senior personnel with job security which will make it possible for them to build careers in the field. In time, some way should be found to provide local playgroup leaders with salaries, however minimal, that will encourage capable women to enter and remain in the playgroup.

2. Programme: Children learn through activity. Where 100 children are grouped together there is limited opportunity for individuals to be actively involved with adults in learning situations. It was recommended that the children be grouped according to their ages so that their playgroup leader could plan activities which are suited to the level of development of the majority of the 20 children in her group. Additionally, it was suggested that the daily schedule be altered so as to utilize the indoor and outdoor facilities in full. Techniques for involving the children in daily routes and the care of equipment and supplies were also suggested.

Considering the multi-purpose nature of the playgroup classrooms, it was suggested that rather than equipping them with

enough tables and chairs for all the children, each centre be provided with table space to accommodate 20 children at a time, working while standing. Chairs are not of first priority. Techniques for temporary use of the wall space were described and it was suggested that clear guidelines for the purchase of toys and new equipment be provided to parents committees.

The lack of teaching-learning materials in the Chichewa language was noted and it was recommended that encouragement be given to all personnel to develop local language materials.

3. Parents: The concept of playgroups is built on parent involvement. In order to obtain the maximal involvement of parents, it was recommended that at least 80% of the members in each parents committee have their children currently enrolled in the playgroup. It was also suggested that playgroup leaders seek ways to increase parents' familiarity with what happens in the playgroup.

   In order to increase the budget for the running of the playgroups it was suggested that the APSPM examine the possibility of having tuition fees that families pay adjusted according to the family income level. This would not increase the minimum payments due from those who are least able, but would demand of those who are able, to carry an appropriately greater share of the burden.

4. Looking Ahead: Current efforts to broaden the base of government involvement were noted as a positive development. It was suggested that wherever possible, representatives of the Ministry of Education be included in planning at all levels. Similar approaches might be made to the Ministry of Health and selected faculty members of the University of Malawi.

The impact of MCTC is evident in the number of graduates involved in early childhood education and community development courses. It was recommended that the Malawi government continue to avail itself of the opportunity to send selected personnel to MCTC. A second on-the-spot course could be planned for advanced training for local trainees, organizers and supervisors.

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LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

Registered Students

	Nancy Chapondapo	Blantyre	Playgroup Leader
	Pauline Gondwe	Mzuzu	" "
	Wilfred Harawa	Salima	District Social Welfare Officer
	Emmanuel Kalua	Karonga	District Social Welfare Officer
	Leanly Kamwiyo	Zomba	Playgroup Leader
	Betty Kantondo	Lilongwe	" "
	Jane Kathewera	Lilongwe	Playgroup District Organizer
	Senita Khosa	Mzuzu	Playgroup Leader
	Elsie Kumwembe	Lilongwe	" "
*	Nellie Lombola	Mzuzu	District Social Welfare Officer
	Ruth Magola	Blantyre	Playgroup Leader
	Dorothy Majiya	Ntcheu	" "
	Negritta Mandiwa		" "
	Abson Mpunga	Mangochi	District Social Welfare Oficer
	Mary Msiska	Rumphi	Playgroup Leader
	Boniface Muyaya	Blantyre	District Social Welfare Officer
	Christina Mwasangwaro	Karonga	Playgroup Leader
	Bina Njayo	Lilongwe	" "
	Max Nmirenda	Nsanje	District Social Welfare Officer
*	Roseby Namaona	Blantyre	Playgroup District Organizer

* MCTC graduates

Other Participants

	Alice Kamwendo	Zomba	Lecturer, Chancellor College
*	Jean Mbilizi	Blantyre	Community Worker
*	Chrissie Nzumwa	Blantyre	District Social Welfare Officer
	Emiliana Tembo	Blantyre	" " " "
	Fanny Thinowa	Blantyre	Director, Kwelani Nursery School

* MCTC graduates